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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TEL AVIV 000389

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SUBJECT: MISHLEV DISCUSSES PA ELECTIONS, KARNI AND RAFAH CROSSING, AND OUTPOSTS WITH THE AMBASSADOR

REF: TEL AVIV 000296

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Major General Yosef Mishlev told the Ambassador January 24 that preparations for the Palestinian elections were going well, and that the GOI and the Palestinian Authority (PA) had established joint coordination rooms in the West Bank and Gaza for election day to handle security. He said that although East Jerusalem was not his responsibility, he knew that special teams had been established with Israeli police and PA security services. He mentioned that 50,000 Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem would vote in the West Bank for fear of the GOI denying them access to city services in the future, and for fear of the GOI "spying" on them to see if they vote for Hamas. On the Karni crossing, Mishlev explained that the Palestinians had dug a trench eight meters deep, as of January 24, and found a soft spot which could be the tunnel they have been searching for. If it is, the crossing would be re-opened shortly, but otherwise, the PA would dig to 10-12 meters, possibly taking up to a week. Mishlev claimed that he had spoken with PA Prisoner Affairs Minister Sufian Abu Zaida about using Kerem Shalom as an alternative, but said that Abu Zaida rejected the proposal because "he is speaking with Dahlan's voice." He also discussed issues of PA non-compliance with security at Rafah, mentioning items such as a 2-3 minute delay in the video feed, and a lack of personal details on travelers coming into and out of the Gaza Strip. He provided copies of GOI letters written to EU/BAM Lt. Gen. Pistolese on this matter. He mentioned that he had worked out the details for a pilot passenger convoy with the PA in December, but was waiting on the political echelon to make a decision on a start date. Mishlev assured the Ambassador that Alternate Prime Minister Ehud Olmert is serious about moving on illegal outposts, and reported that the IDF is prepared to evacuate the Hebron market and Amona outpost after the Palestinian elections. Mishlev also said that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz had appointed him to look into the recent olive-tree cutting incidents. Post will fax to NEA/IPA a presentation Mishlev gave on Palestinian economic performance in 2005. End summary.

Palestinian Elections

2. (C) Major General Yosef Mishlev told the Ambassador January 24 that preparations for the Palestinian elections were going well, and that the voting materials were in place. He said that elections for the Palestinian security services had taken place the previous day, January 23, and that 58,000 security personnel, approximately 81 percent of the services, had voted through special arrangements. He reported that he met with Palestinian Authority (PA) Minister for Prisoner Affairs Sufian Abu Zaida on the night of the 22nd, and they coordinated the delivery of voting equipment through Sufa crossing for the Gaza Strip. He also mentioned that the GOI and the PA had established on January 21 a joint coordination room in Bet El, near Ramallah, in the West Bank and two rooms in the Gaza Strip, and that the IDF had the authority to make the decisions necessary for elections to go smoothly. He explained that IDF soldiers had been ordered to be on "special behavior," that there would be less IDF presence than normal in major population centers, and that the number of checkpoints would be reduced. The Ambassador asked whether there was a quick reaction force established for any security problems that may arise, and Mishlev responded that there was one set up for the West Bank but there was no need for one in the Gaza Strip. The Ambassador noted that one possibility was for election day to go well, but for violence to arise during the vote count if Fatah saw that it was not doing as well as it expected. Mishlev acknowledged that this could be a big problem, especially in areas like Nablus, Jenin, Khan Yunis, and Rafah because they are typically violent. He said, however, that he knew USSC General Dayton had advised PA Internal Security Minister Nasir Yusif to act against violence, and hoped that he would do so.

3. (C) In response to the DCM's question on voting in East Jerusalem, Mishlev responded that Jerusalem was not under his responsibility, but that he had made some recommendations to the Vice Prime Minister, on which he did not elaborate. He said he knew, however, that special teams had been established with Israeli police and PA security services. He

continued that 1,000 Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem had voted for the PA presidential election in 2005, and that for this election, approximately 2,000 had recently picked up their voting cards allowing them to cast ballots in East Jerusalem. Mishlev said that another 50,000 Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem would vote in the West Bank for fear of the GOI denying them access to city services in the future if they are known to have voted in Palestinian elections. He said some may also be concerned that the GOI is "spying" on them to see whether they vote for Hamas. The Ambassador asked whether these fears were unfounded, and Mishlev assured him that they were, and that the GOI had no intention of either spying on Palestinians or denying them access to Jerusalem in the future.

Karni Crossing

14. (C) Mishlev reported to the Ambassador that Karni has been closed since January 15 in coordination with the PA after Israel obtained intelligence of a planned terror attack on the terminal through a tunnel. He said that the PA has been digging to find this tunnel, and, as of January 24, has reached a depth of eight meters with the help of two Israeli backhoes. He explained that at approximately 0400 hours January 24, the PA found a soft spot with sand of a different color that could be the tunnel they were looking for, in addition to a sewage pipe, discovered earlier, that had been blocked to prevent flooding. He mentioned that if this newly identified spot was the tunnel, the crossing could be re-opened on January 25; if it was not the tunnel, however, the PA would continue digging to 10-12 meters, and this could take up to a week. If no tunnel has been found by then, he indicated, the GOI would likely re-open Karni anyway. He claimed that he had suggested to the IDF that the crossing be re-opened now, but the IDF said it was too risky because there are 20 civilians working there. He explained that if an attack from such a tunnel kills Israelis at Karni now -- after disengagement -- the GOI would take a very long time before opening it again. The Ambassador asked whether sensors could be installed underground to detect any digging, and Mishlev responded that any sensors would have to be installed on the Palestinian side, which would be problematic.

15. (C) PolCouns asked whether the Palestinians had been cooperative in their efforts to find the tunnel. Mishlev replied that the PA is divided: the National Security Forces under Ahmad Hillas have cooperated, but not the Preventive Security Organization under Muhammad Dahlan and Rashid Abu Shabak. He continued that overall, however, the GOI is satisfied with the PA's efforts, and said that he hopes they find the tunnel so that the PA "doesn't think we made it up." He said that opening the crossing was important for the Palestinians' quality of life, and that he wants the PA to be assured that the GOI is committed to keeping the crossings open, as Rafah and Erez have been despite three Qassam attacks that morning and other security threats. According to Mishlev, Israel was acting in good faith by allowing 3,000 laborers, 1,000 merchants, and 1,000 patients seeking medical treatment to cross into Israel regardless of any threats. (Note: Mishlev also commented that 10,000 laborers and 12,000 merchants entered Israel from the West Bank, and that 16,000 Palestinians are allowed to work in the industrial zones of the settlements. End note.) Mishlev briefly cited the Erez Industrial Zone, which is to come under management by a Turkish firm, and said that the GOI is currently discussing security arrangements with Turkey. He claimed "things are going well," and that the zone should be open in a year, after old factories have been demolished and replaced with new buildings.

16. (C) Mishlev noted that the Sufa crossing was being used to bring in humanitarian goods, and that the GOI was aware of the problem of trying to get agricultural goods out of Gaza. He said he had suggested to Abu Zaida that Kerem Shalom be used as an alternative to Karni because a scanner could be transferred there within 24 hours, and the crossing has the capacity to scan 35 trucks per day. He claimed, however, that Abu Zaida rejected this proposal because "he is speaking with Dahlan's voice." The Ambassador asked why Kerem Shalom could not be opened now for imports from Egypt since it is going to be open in the future. Mishlev agreed, but said there is "nothing on the ground."

Rafah

17. (C) Mishlev discussed several issues of non-compliance with security at the Rafah crossing. His first point was that the PA (specifically Dahlan) has refused to recognize the validity of the security protocol, which he characterized as essential. He also said that there is a 2-3 minute delay in the data feed, and that the PA is not transmitting video

24 hours a day, but only when the crossing is open. Acting Defense Attache asked why the GOI needs a constant stream of video, even when the crossing is not open, and Mishlev claimed that "they are opening the gates at night," so unprocessed travelers are getting into Gaza. Mishlev continued that the GOI is not receiving the full details of travelers coming into Gaza, such as nationalities and passport numbers, and is not receiving any notification of travelers leaving Gaza for Egypt. PolCouns asked whether the IDF is able to synchronize the data it receives on computers with the travelers it sees on the video screen. Mishlev responded that it cannot do this because the GOI's room in the liaison center "doesn't get the details" and therefore "can't process because the data isn't coming across." He provided the Ambassador a package of GOI letters to EU/BAM Lt. Gen. Pistolese with six examples of alleged non-compliance.

18. (C) Mishlev also mentioned that particular difficulties have arisen with Palestinians who arrived in Gaza in 1995 with visiting permits under the Interim Agreement. He explained that 60,000 Palestinians stayed illegally after their permits expired, and this has proven problematic because the GOI has no record of them if or when they try to cross into Israel as laborers. He said half stayed in Gaza and half stayed in the West Bank, but the GOI does not have current registration for them and thus cannot process them if they try to exit Gaza. (Comment: Since these Palestinian illegals do not possess ID numbers, they may be the source of Israeli claims that "foreigners" are being allowed into Gaza through Rafah. End comment.)

Convoys

19. (C) Mishlev told the Ambassador that he has met with former PA Planning Minister Ghassan al-Khatib, and that they have "bridged all the gaps" with respect to convoys. (Note: He said the last time they met was in December. End note.) Mishlev said that they have agreed to a pilot program of a convoy with five buses, and that al-Khatib said he would meet with PA President Mahmud Abbas to see if the plan is acceptable. According to Mishlev, Targumiya and Erez are ready for the convoys to begin. From the GOI's perspective, the MOD/IDF is simply waiting for a decision from the political echelon for a date on which to start the convoys. PolCouns asked what would be required for the government to decide on a start date, and Mishlev responded "nothing special" besides security considerations. He claimed that the GOI would review the convoys issue after the Palestinian elections. The DCM asked about allowing West Bankers to visit Gaza, and about the possibility of establishing a special category for students. Mishlev replied that for now, the first phase is a pilot program only, and the convoys could be expanded later. He also said that the issue of students is currently in the High Court, but assured the DCM that he has "enlarged the categories" to allow more people than had originally been planned to travel. The Ambassador emphasized to Mishlev that starting the convoys as soon as possible is important because Palestinians would see convoys as a benefit that could be taken away in the event of a terrorist attack, which might reduce popular support for terrorism. Moreover, implementing convoys would prove to them that the GOI is operating in good faith.

Hebron and Amona, Olive Tree Incidents

10. (C) The Ambassador asked Mishlev about the IDF's plan to evacuate settlers from the Hebron market and to demolish nine permanent houses in Amona outpost, given Alternate Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's recent announcement (reftel). Mishlev assured the Ambassador that the evacuations would take place very soon because Olmert wants immediate action on these outposts. He said, "We are going to act in the market, Amona, and others," but mentioned that the IDF operations have been postponed until after the Palestinian elections. Mishlev commented that Olmert has been very clear on his expectations with respect to outposts, and that last month he "began a policy of enforcing the law" in the West Bank. As part of his policy, Olmert wants to prevent any Israeli building on private Palestinian land, and wants to demolish any construction in the very beginning phases, such as when concrete is laid down for foundations, according to Mishlev. He mentioned the recent demolitions of a foundation in Neve Daniel in the Gush Etzion bloc, and in Revava in the Ariel bloc as examples of Olmert's policy in action. The Ambassador asked whether there is any date set for the evacuations, and Mishlev responded that it would be after the elections because the GOI did not want to interrupt the process. He reiterated that "something will happen," and replied affirmatively when the Ambassador asked whether this included the 20 post-March 2001 outposts that Olmert mentioned in his speech. The Ambassador asked about reports

that Head of Central Command Major General Yair Naveh is negotiating with the Hebron settlers to leave peacefully now in exchange for being allowed to return "legally" in a few months. Mishlev confirmed that this was the case, and that the GOI is currently looking into canceling the Palestinian shop-owners' protected status because the land "is Jewish." (Comment: The result of this would be for the shop-owners to lose their buildings. Press reports suggest that the GOI would then rent the buildings back to the settlers. Mishlev was vague on who actually owned the land, but claimed it was privately held. End comment.)

11. (C) Mishlev briefly mentioned the incidents of olive-tree cutting in the West Bank. He said Minister of Defense Shaul Mofaz had appointed him to check into this issue, and that he had recently visited the farmers. Mishlev claimed that in a committee meeting on January 23, he made recommendations to compensate the farmers, to demolish the outposts near the affected areas, and to increase the IDF, police, and Shin Bet presence in order to take weapons from settlers and to arrest settlers who perpetrate these acts. He noted that in one of the fields where olive trees were cut, the GOI had found an identity card belonging to a settler from Elon Moreh; the settler first denied the card was his, and later said it had been stolen from him and dropped in the field, according to Mishlev.

Land Confiscations in al-Tuwani

12. (C) The Ambassador asked about recent orders to confiscate approximately 54 dunams of land near the Palestinian village of al-Tuwani for the construction of a secondary fence along Rt. 317 from Karmel settlement to Susya settlement, south of Hebron. (Note: ConGen poloffs and Embassy econoff visited the area January 20 and will report on the trip septel). The Ambassador noted that the villagers would have to travel an additional 10 kilometers to the town of Yattah for services, and that the fence would place them in a seam zone between that fence and the separation barrier running along the Green Line in the southern West Bank. Mishlev asked that further details be sent to his deputy, Lt. Col. Daniel Beaudoin; econoff will follow up with Beaudoin.

13. (C) Mishlev concluded the meeting with a presentation on the trends of the Palestinian economy in 2005. Post will fax a copy of the slides to NEA/IPA.

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